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LACUNAE
ISSUE #9
MATURE READERS
Stephen Bissette: Still Talkin' !!!
This Issue Meet Visage Studios and Founder Rich Buckler
Special Cyberzen Preview
New Fiction by David Pettigrew

LACUNAE #9

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Making the mark...

Comic Book Legend ***Rich Buckler*** talks about the state of comics. An *exclusive* interview with **Visage Studios** reveals the lives of 6 creators, seasoned and newcomers, in relation to comic books today.
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The Horror Show

by Jim Kerbaugh

Jerry stood in the damp alley, fumbling with the prodigious ring of keys he carried on a chain fastened to a belt loop of his green-plaid slacks. Held forgotten what most of them were for, but he figured they all still must open something, and besides, having so many made him feel important. They were one of the trappings of authority. And Jerry was the boss.

A sudden scraping sound from beyond the dumpster caused him to interrupt his methodical examination of the keys. "Is somebody there?" he called. But of course nobody was. Somebody would be there only in the movies Jerry broadcast every night. Was fiction, after all, stranger, and consequently more interesting, than truth? And if so, was that bad?

But Jerry wasn't really interested in metaphysics. What had once been the best part of his day was beginning. For some time now held pretty much let the station run itself. Underlings could be trusted to hit the right switches for the farm reports, the syndicated talk shows, the reruns of "Love That Bob" and "The Restless Gun. Jerry, who'd owned the station for as long as anybody could remember and could pick his own hours, came in late every night, taking the midnight to 4 a.m. shift as the host of "The Horror Show..."

He was still fingering the keys when the deadbolt was turned from inside and the door opened just enough to emit a slice of light and an old man's head.

"Thought I heard you out here," the old guy grumbled.

"'Lo, Pete."

"You oughta let me keep them keys for you. One of these times you'll stand out there and never get to the end of 'em. I always have to let you in."

"That's a fact."

"So it ain't like you get any real use out of 'em—is it?"

"Well, now, I don't know about that. I guess I'll hang onto them. Feel funny without 'em. Quiet night?"

"We ever have any other kind?"

"What's on?"

"'Life of Riley.'"

"Already? My watch must be slow." He tapped the face. "Stopped. What have I got?"

"Thirty-eight minutes."

"What a revoltin' development," Jerry muttered, bustling back to the garage-sale dresser which served as his makeup table.

Frank Forte

There really wasn't much left in the makeup drawer - some latex for scars and other disfigurements, a tube of corpse-white cream makeup from K-Mart, a sack of imitation wool for goatees and Fu Manchus, several sets of plastic vampire teeth, a package of Amazing Lee Press-On Nails. Jerry wondered why he continued to take the trouble. His audience seemed to dwindle by the week. Most of the little mail he got was either complaints or wisecracks from people who watched him and his movies because they couldn't sleep or had nothing going for them late at night. His reputable advertisers hadn't renewed their contracts, and he was reduced to running pitches for dubious diet plans and law firms that specialized in personal injury cases.

He was wasting his time and was doing nobody any good. He'd quit answering the phone. In the old days when he'd operated the station almost single-handedly, he'd taken every call, listening to all the advice, petitions, complaints, cajolements, and bribes, though of course without acting on any of them. One day he found himself pretending to be his own assistant and saying he was out, that he'd return the various calls when he returned from lunch or wherever. Then he'd tell people they had the wrong number or he would pinch his nose and say

the number was no longer in service. For some time now he'd just been letting it ring. No wonder things had gone to seed. Maybe it was getting to be that time, when he'd simply pull the plug on the phone, the station, the whole business.

Some night, very likely in the not unforeseeable future, his audience - a handful of hard-core horror fans - would switch on the set and be confronted with the apocalyptic vision of a blank screen. But not just yet. Jerry continued to feel - at least part of the time - something like a commitment to the ones who couldn't sleep and watched without writing bitchy, wiseguy letters. There had to be some like that. Maybe they were the ones trying to get through on the phone. For them he continued to put on his masks and run the films that weren't really scary, but gave a faint illusion of content and purpose, however slight, random, or arbitrary, to the middle of a restless night.

"Just started 'Bachelor Father,"' Pete called back. "Better get a wiggle on."

"Okay."

So - what character tonight? There was neither time nor Ace bandages for a mummy. A mad scientist would be quick and easy, but he'd done that several times recently. A ragged coat, bushy eyebrows, and a shovel would transform him into a resurrection-man a' la Karloff in The Body Snatchers. But it was a new idea - his first in quite a while - and it might take some time to get the eyebrows right. There was just time for a basic vampire.

"Guess you won't be lookin' at the mail again," Pete observed, pulling up an old dinette chair upholstered in aquamarine plastic.

"No time now. Maybe tomorrow," Jerry said, squinting at the cloudy mirror as he slicked back his thinning hair. Held always been a bit nearsighted, and his vision wasn't getting any better, but he continued to resist glasses. Maybe it was just strain, and everything would come clear when he shut down the transmitter. "Anything interesting?"

"Wal-Mart circular. Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes. Couple letters."

"I can imagine." He squeezed too much of the corpse-pallor cream out of the tube, and it occurred to him that maybe the time to pack it all in would be when the makeup drawer was empty, when there were no more faces for him to show his few remaining, faithful viewers. But not before he'd crafted the wild eyebrows and done the resurrection-man. It would be neat to go out with a performance like that.

"One of 'em was kind of nice. Pitiful too. From a guy that wishes you'd do one more movie of a night. Go right on in to the farm report."

"Hm." People were always wanting something, better movies or all-night broadcasting. But Jerry had been at this a long time, and he still thought - though he had to admit with diminishing conviction - that he knew what they needed better than they did. People needed to rest, and anyway, he suspected there was nothing he could do for somebody who couldn't get to sleep by four a.m. He wasn't even sure he had the resources to give them what they asked for. Sometimes they just expected too much.

"Want me to read it to you?"

"No. "

"Just tell you 'bout it?"

"No, Pete."

"It was from an old guy—widower. His cat died awhile back, and he says he's too old to get another one. Got no family to find it a home when he checks out."

Jerry had put his hands over his ears, but it hadn't done any good. Held heard every syllable and mussed his Transylvanian pompadour into the bargain. He could just see the old guy at four a.m., hoisting himself out of an uncomfortable chair, alone and unable to sleep but with nothing else to do, hobbling toward a darkened room.

In the old days Jerry would have said something on the air, though now he couldn't imagine what, just to let the person on the other end know he'd connected. Tonight he knew he wouldn't. The movies would have to suffice. He hoped the titles: "The Brain That Wouldn't Die," and "The Brain Eaters" wouldn't seem too forbidding to his audience, most of whom he suspected were undereducated as well as overweight and in need of an attorney.

At one time Jerry would have done some research and expended considerable thought before he selected a week's films. He would have screened them both in advance to be sure of their appropriateness, taking notes for the script for his introduction, interludes, and sign-off, all of which he would thoroughly rehearse. Now he just ordered the movies alphabetically from a catalogue, knowing they were all in the same, and by far the largest, category - watchable if you were desperate. He now improvised his introduction, stringing together clichés or absurdities suggested by the titles. Tonight he'd probably say something about concocting a mess of brains and eggs. He could have Pete put the hotplate and a skillet in the studio.

But how was he going to come up with brains at such a late hour? With just a little planning, a bit of foresight, he could have recognized the need and provided for it with a package of pork brains from the all-night IGA, which he had passed on his way to work. But, as he had noticed was becoming more frequently the case, it was too late and he was empty-handed. Without a single prop - even the tattered paper skeleton was gone - he was reduced to mugging and making wisecracks. Though it was unlikely that his audience would recognize it, or care if they did, the poverty of his operation was being brought home to Jerry. He could feel his cheeks flushing beneath the slick pallor of his makeup.

"Four minutes," Pete called.

"Okay."

"Comb your hair."

"What?"

"You look like The Three Stooges."

"Which one?"

"All three at the same time."

Jerry squinted into the dim, vague mirror, thinking it was hardly possible, even if it was true. Things had sure gotten more informal lately. In the old days Pete had addressed him as "sir." But that had degenerated into "boss," and finally into statements and questions preceded by no direct form of address. It did look like he'd hung around too long, refusing to retire gracefully, or even grudgingly, as his predecessors had done when their time came.

He raked the pocket comb through his saturated hair and fastened the worn, shiny black cape at the neck with a safety pin. The getup didn't look like much, but it would do. It was as good as the movies - maybe even a little better.

So - what to say? Well, what was in the synopsis? The Brain That Wouldn't Die. A severed head kept alive while a suitable replacement could be found for the corpus. There was nothing about any trouble in attaching the two, and no questions posed about the worthiness of the head to be preserved. The mad scientist trying to salvage his true love. Jerry assumed that something would occur to him. Something almost always did, though it wasn't necessarily sensible, relevant, or coherent. Certainly not all three.

Standing in front of the camera, Jerry still didn't have anything to say to his viewers. He tugged at the cape, which wasn't really long enough, and wondered if he'd approved the ad that was running. Maybe. It was easier to sign something if you didn't bother to read it, and Pete had for some time been exceeding his authority, which did, after all, decrease Jerry's burden. But still...

"America's hottest and most beautiful girls are waiting to talk to you, one-on-one. Call now. The girl you've just been dreaming about is waiting to hear from you. Nine dollars a minute. Callers must be eighteen or over."

Jerry watched the young women, presumably spilling their torrid secrets into telephones. They showed all their teeth while they talked, which would have made them look rather fierce, but the effect was dissipated by their vacuous eyes. He felt sorry for all the desperate boys and gulping, middle-aged dips who'd be blowing their money to talk to, well, who would listen to all those embarrassing upheavals on the graveyard shift for minimum wage? Women with bad teeth and worse grammar, who needed to wash their hair, who smoked and chewed gum at the same time. Jerry knew that bad horror movies weren't really so bad. But knowing it didn't make him feel any better.

"In five, four, three," Pete said.

"Good evening, my little horribilities," Jerry intoned, just barely remembering his bad accent. "To all you children of the night..."

Pete started to howl, but had to break off to clear his throat.

"I bid you welcome. Dim the lights and make yourself comfortable - if you can - for your graveyard shift of viewing pleasure. Push your chair into a corner of the room, away from the windows, so you'll have a false sense of security, and settle in for two of the most horrible films ever made. Then sleep...if you can. I have to go out for a while and find something to eat - something *rare* - but I'll drop back from time to time to see if you're all still with me. Until then, if you think you hear wings beating outside in the night, just tell yourself it's your imagination. And now, our first feature, The Brain That Wouldn't Die.

"How was it?"

"I've heard better," he said, shrugging his shoulders and looking away.

"Yeah? Well, I have too. Guess this isn't your night to howl."

Pete set his lips and checked the schedule of commercial breaks.

"Sorry, Pete."

"Don't worry 'bout it."

"I guess neither one of us is doing real well these days."

"You just now noticin' that?" Pete sneered. Jerry had noticed that though discipline, even civility, had deteriorated, Pete rarely made a sugges-

tion and never challenged his authority. But he'd become an irascible, sarcastic old fart.

"I've known it a while. What do you think we ought to do about it?"

"Don't ask me. You're the boss. It's your baby. And I don't do diapers."

And he wanted the keys turned over to him.

"You ever think about retiring, Pete?"

"Every day."

"Why do you keep on?"

"Why do you?"

"I asked you first."

"I don't know. I guess it's just easier to do what you do instead of something you don't."

"Would you be all right if I shut it down?"

"Sure. Who knows? Either I will or I won't. What'll you do with yourself?"

"I don't have any idea. I've thought about it and I just keep coming up with '*I don't know.*'"

"Maybe we're stuck."

"It can't get much worse."

"Sure it can. It's been gettin' worse since I can remember."

"There were some good years...back there."

"I guess so. If you say so. But they're long gone."

"Maybe not. There's always a market for nostalgia."

"Not much of one. Not for what we've got in the vault. People've got better things to do."

"More things. Different things."

"Don't kid yourself. You know, I bet there's times every day when not a soul is tuned in."

"I can't believe that," Jerry said, but he had flinched when Pete said it, so he knew it was obvious that he could believe it, though he didn't actually think it was very likely.

"You can only run 'Father Knows Best' past people so many times. Commercial," he said, getting up. "You going on?"

"I guess so. I always do after the first break."

"You screen the movie?"

"No."

"So you won't know what you're talking about."

"It won't matter if nobody's listening." All at once the accumulated depression, or despair, that had come as a result of having lost his audience, of being ignored because he had become irrelevant, superannuated, anachronistic, made him feel very tired. He didn't see how he could continue if even the old guy without a cat had switched channels, if it was just a matter of waiting for the last sponsors - the bartender's academy and the pay-by-the-month auto insurance for people with DUI convictions - to go play somewhere else.

"...as you watch those excess pounds melt away effortlessly to reveal the new, confident, active you that's just been waiting for a chance to be reborn. Call today."

"In five, four, three..."

"Don't go away," Jerry said, trying not to sound like he was pleading. "The horror has just begun, and once you've started, you might as well endure it to the end - if you dare." He drew back his upper lip to show the plastic fangs, which felt like they were about to slip off. "But maybe it's already been too much for the faint-hearted..." He shielded his eyes and leaned toward the camera, as if scanning the dens of his viewers.

"Is anybody still there?"

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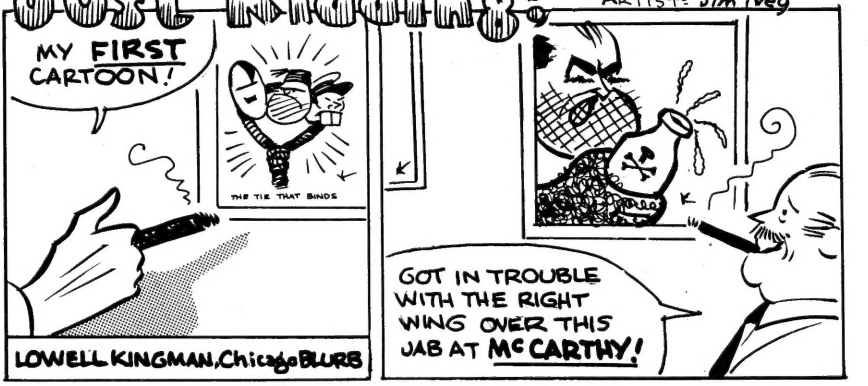
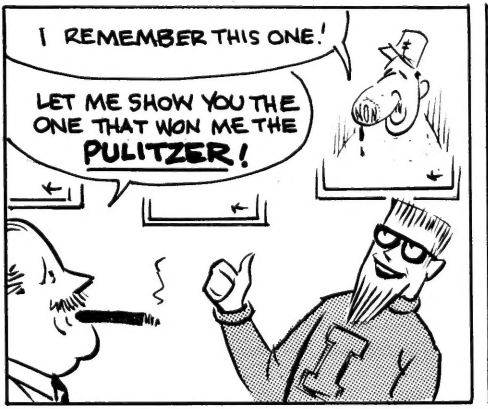
indy #15 features an original cover and interview with Hugo award-winning artist Charles Vess!

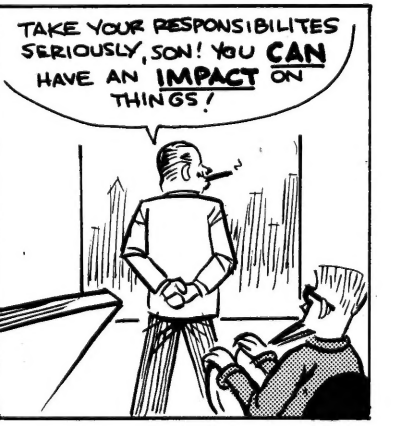
indy #16 features an original cover and interview with Eisner award-winning creator, Evan Dorkin!

Just Kiddin'!

WRITER: Mitch Hyman
ARTIST: Jim Ivey


MY FIRST CARTOON!
THE TIE THAT BINDS
LOWELL KINGMAN, Chicago BLURB
GOT IN TROUBLE WITH THE RIGHT WING OVER THIS JAB AT McCARTHY!





BEIJING :
THINGS HAVE COME TO A HEAD!

TALK IS NO GOOD! IT'S TIME FOR ACTION!

WHAT'S UP?
GLOBAL ALERT!
COME ON!

DANGER OF WAR IMMINENT!
FROM CHINA COMES A REPORT OF...

DON'T DRINK DAYTIMES... BUT ARMAGGEDON COMES BUT ONCE!

THINGS ARE AWRY! HOW CAN YOU SIT THERE DRINKING?
I'M JUST AN OLD CARTOONIST, RETIRING TODAY!

HEY! NO MATTER WHAT, YOU OWE US A CARTOON TODAY!

CORPORATE SCHMUCK! OH WELL, TIME FOR ONE LAST EFFORT!

HA! HA! KINGMAN'S DONE IT!!
HA
HA
HA

PARIS:
FORMIDABLE! HA HA HA
HA
HA
HA

MOSCOW:
HA HA HA
THE KREMLIN MUST SEE THIS!
HA
HA
HA

MID-EAST:
HA HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
TOKYO:

HMMMm!
CALL BACK THE TROOPS!
HEE HEE! TRUE, TRUE! SO TRUE!
IT'S AMAZING HE LEFT THE ORIGINAL! IT'S SO FUNNY!
HE'S ENJOYING HIS RETIREMENT!
LET ME SHOW YOU MY LAST CARTOON...

LIMITED SIGNED PRINT: KINGMAN'S LAST CARTOON THAT SAVED THE WORLD WITH BASIC HUMOR !!!! $25.

Rich Buckler

John Orlando

Rick Buckler Jr.

Naser Subashi

Winston Blakely

Vernel McDade

In the realm of comics, six guys trek from their homefronts to a studio on Fifth Avenue in none other than New York City. Their quest: to become noticed in the comic book industry as competent artists and storytellers. For some, such as 25-year comic veteran Rich Buckler, the task of being published in the limelight of comics has been accomplished and well noted. For others, it's a dream steadily becoming true.

To mention Visage Studios in the credits of a comic book is to tell readers that a group of writers, pencillers, inkers and much more, have poured their hearts into something they truly enjoy.

The studio began four years ago as a training ground for up and coming New York area comics artists. Founded by Rich, Walter McDaniel, and Rich's son, Rick Buckler Jr., it evolved over the years into an artists' network.

"Sometimes a publisher approaches us with a studio project that involves all of our artists, or (the publisher) needs an entire book packaged (pencil, ink, lettering coloring). If there is work overflow, that's where the networking comes in," says Rich, art director for the studio.

Each artist has a different style or specialty. But none fall in the category of anything but superb.

What Prompted You To Get Into Comics?

Rich Sr.: Well, for each of us the answer's going to be very different, but one thing we all have in common is that we love to tell a story using pictures.

John: All of us love to draw, but it's not just drawing pictures. It's making a dramatic statement with each picture that makes a comic book artist different from an illustrator or painter. Comic book artists are visual storytellers, and all of my favorite artists, my favorite influences - and Rich is certainly one of them - are strongest in the area of storytelling.

Naser: That's true. Learning how to make pictures that come to life, and make your characters come to life - that's the biggest challenge, and the most fun!

Rich Sr.: I think if you're not putting storytelling first, you're fooling yourself and cheating your readers. No matter how well drawn your work is, no matter how well-rendered, it has to come to life like in the movies. If you're just into solving drawing problems and producing attractive pictures, you're probably leaning more toward illustration. The first thing I teach to artists who are just beginning is to not get hung up in their drawing skills (or their lack of it), but to zero in on the story first.

Rick Jr.: And not to worry about technique, or having a "style." When I was little, I used to watch my father work. I was amazed at the way his characters would act, and how cool the action scenes were. Everybody in his stories seemed real to me. I never stopped to think, "Hey, these are just cartoons…" or "Wow, look how well-drawn that picture is…" To me,

it was like magic or something.

Rich Sr.: Well, in a way it is, but the magic has to be in you, the artist. Everything you draw, the situation, characters, action - it all has to seem real to the artist before it can become magical to your readers.

Winston: I think it's great that comics artists get to exercise their imaginations, to create whole new beings and universes. That's what appeals to me the most. Look out, world - here comes the "Blakely-verse!"

art © 1996 McDade & Subashi

John: That "magic" of comics comes from the imagination. Probably the most appealing thing about this field is that the artist is allowed to apply his imagination almost entirely unrestrained. It's almost like getting an ultimate high from a new drug!

Who And/Or What Are Your Major Influences?

Rich Sr.: That's a tough one. You want a list? Jack Kirby, John Buscema and Neal Adams were my earliest influences. In my first art samples, when I first began, there were a lot of diverse influences: Joe Kubert, Wally Wood, Angelo Torres, Frank Frazetta, Burne Hogarth, Will Eisner, Jim Steranko, Gil Kane. Of course, when you're young and just starting out, you don't know *who* you want to be - so you try being a lot of different guys, until eventually it all comes together and you develop your own style.

John: I remember not having a style. I worried about that a lot.

Rich Sr.: So did I when I started out. But you (John) had a style when we first met - you just didn't know you had one.

Rick Jr.: I guess I was influenced a lot by my dad, but I developed my own thing pretty early on. A lot of European stuff, Heavy Metal, Frazetta…

Naser: I don't go back very far, so it's mostly Image and Todd McFarlane's *SpiderMan.*

Vern: Same here. But Eric Larsen is really my favorite. But hanging out with other artists, you get turned on to lots of great stuff.

Rich Sr.: John and I have similar tastes and influences, though he leans more toward monsters and horror.

What Type of Work Do You Enjoy Most? Comics? Genres?

John: I think Rich just answered that one for me already. But definitely add Marvel superheroes from the late '60s to the late '70s. Also, pre-code horror books.

Vern: I like anything good.

Rick Jr.: What kind of answer is that?

Vern: Uh, not a very good one? But it's true.

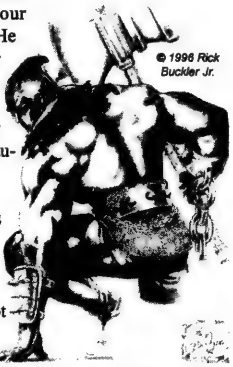
Rich Sr.: Probably superheroes figure prominently in the work of the Visage Studios artists - but we embrace all genres.

What Types of Music Do You Listen to When in the Studio Working?

Rich Sr.: Definitely Rock, guitar-driven Rock - Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughn. Also classical - anything by Rach Maninov, Beethoven…

John: Punk. Beatles. Anything visceral.

Rich Sr.: Visceral? Whoa. John's the writer in our group, you can tell. He eats dictionaries for breakfast, and snacks on grammar textbooks. I think he's secretly writing his own thesaurus.



Naser: Winston favors cool jazz. I like anything not too noisy.

Rick Jr.: Yeah, and not too exciting. Winston and Naser are the studio wusses. Classic Rock Rules - Free, AC/DC, Iron Maiden, Hendrix, Cream, The Doors. Also

punk and anything loud, with lots of attitude!

Rich Sr.: Hey, what about Vern?

Vern: I like almost anything...

In the Last Year, What is the Biggest Hurdle You've Overcome as Writing/Illustrating?

Rich Sr.: Doing our own creator-owned projects - and then getting the stuff published. Each artist here has his own creations, each in various states of completion. I think Naser was the first to see print with his own character.

Naser: Yes. Desiree - for Millenium - an eight-page story in *Song of the Sirens*.

When Considering New Members, What Do You Look For?

Rich Sr.: In addition to some evidence in drawing ability, I look for the right attitude - a willingness to learn, and the persistence and discipline necessary to see a project through to the end. A pleasant personality is definitely a plus. We're not actively seeking new members at this time. However, we do offer lessons on an individual basis.

from Visages #1, ashcan art © 1996 Winston Blakely

What Are Your Goals, Both Individually and as a Studio Operation?

Rich Sr.: To get published! As much as possible! That pretty much sums it up! Oh, yeah, Naser wants to be a comic book god....

Naser: It works for me.

Winston Blakely

Rick Jr.: I want to be overpaid and overrated. (laughs)

Winston: To make a living writing and drawing comics.

Vern: To meet everybody famous that I admire, and learn whatever I can from them.

John: What about making a living?

Vern: Oh, yeah, that too.

cover to NightCry Vol VI by John Orlando & Rick Buckler Jr.

How Far From The Studio Do Each of You Live? And is this Full-Time Work for You?

Rich Sr.: Everybody makes their own hours, but everybody's pretty much full-time. We're in Midtown Manhattan and everyone commutes, from:

Vern: Brooklyn

Naser & Winston: Queens

John: Valley Stream (Long Island).

Rick Jr.: Bronx.

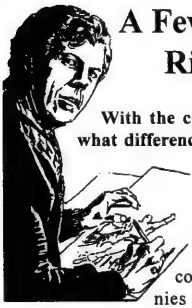
Rich Sr.: I walk to work.

John: When the regular work is coming in, that is. Otherwise, we work part-time jobs to subsidize work on our own projects.

Rick Buckler Jr.

How Well Do You Work Together? What Keeps the Drive?

Rich Sr.: Well, we all love our work, so we're always on. There's mutual respect in our group. Each artist has his own particular strengths or weaknesses. We try to team up in a way that will play up our strengths in any collaborative work.



A Few Words With Rich Buckler

With the comics industry in a glut, what differences do you see now in the comics marketplace from how it was the last time it happened?

Things definitely go in cycles. The last time these conditions occurred, companies downsized and freelance work became scarce. I was at DC Comics then, working full-time, and was one of the few freelance artists in constant demand. So I was relatively unaffected. This time, it's tougher - no steady assignments, and high-powered marketing techniques now seem to be the order of the day.

My strategy this time is to concentrate on creator-owned material and build things up from there. I've sort of come full-circle, having already drawn just about every character I ever wanted to, and worked for nearly every major comics publisher. I'm still a big comics fan, but the big difference now is that I have the ability, skill and know-how to do what I started out doing as a comics fan (in my amateur days) and that is to create, write and publish my own characters and ideas.

You're the art director and you work with your son. Is it more difficult to work with him?

It's actually a big kick to work with my son. We get along great and have a lot of similar influences. But Rick always brings something new and unexpected to projects we work on together. He's definitely his own person and has developed in his own chosen direction. On studio projects, I tend to depend on him even more than the others. And he always comes through!

You two have distinctive styles. Was this always the case?

Well, no, of course not. When he was a pre-teen, he imitated as closely as possible. But he really didn't become committed to being a comics artist until his early twenties. That's when he came on board with me at Neal Adams' Continuity Studio. We both worked there full-time for about two years each. I was woodshedding - a seasoned pro going "back to school," studying and taking on new challenges so I wouldn't go stale.

What are some of your current projects?

All of my current efforts are being done in the small, so-called "independent publishers" arena. It's really where most of the fresh, new ideas are coming from. And the comics that are self-published, or published in short runs, seem to be a lot more fun than most current mainstream comics.

In October, I'm doing two projects with Roy Thomas (*X-Files*): ***The Forever Warriors*** (Aardwolf) - a 24 page, black/white toned comic with a hand-colored cover penciled by me and with inks by George Perez. This is a modern retelling of the Wizard of Oz saga, drawn in a Jack Kirby-inspired New Gods/Forever People style. Charles Barnett III is inking the interiors. ***Death Machine*** (DotCmx) is a project scheduled for the Internet. It's illustrated by me and my son. It's sort of an updated, more extreme *Deathlok*.

from Forever Warriors
© 1996 Rich Buckler & Roy Thomas

Rich Buckler has been a major influence in the comic book industry and helped launch the careers of Todd McFarlane (*Spawn*), Jim Lee, Mark Texiera, George Perez & others. He also created the original *Deathlok*.

Credits (just a few...)

Tales/Teen Titans #51-54; *Superman* #319; *Daredevil* #134-5; *Marvel Spotlight* #33; *Astonishing Tales (feat. Deathlok); Black Knight* #2-4; *Captain America* #243; *Defenders* #77, #79-84; *World's Finest* #280; *Mighty Crusaders* #1-5; *Spect. Spider-Man* #107-9; *All Star Squadron (co-created w/ Roy Thomas)*

John Orlando's work of art...

His name really emerged in the independent comics arena not long ago...his "happy" signature screams that he loves what he does. Now, for John Orlando, the comics market is beginning to call his name. Soon, it will be screaming it. With two books being released under the CFD imprint in February 1997, Orlando's got his work cut out for him...

You love what you do. Why?
I love all of the narrative arts and I shoot for something of all of them in the writing and artwork. When I sit down to lay out a page, it's all about "movie directing," rather than making "pretty pictures." If the storytelling and cinematography aren't there, then all of the slick finishes and computer tricks don't really amount to anything.

What are some key projects or pros you'd like to work with?
As far as projects go, I'd love to get my hands on any of the classic Marvel characters - writing and pencilling - for a few issues to show them a few things they seem to have forgotten!! As for the pros I'd like to work with, I've already worked with one of my major influences - specifically Rich Buckler Sr. - and I'm about to begin a project with the great Roy Thomas for CFD. With experiences like these, who has time for wishful thinking?

Shipping - February 1997

Cybergen:
Cybergen's characters (Dr. Warlock, Slither & Cyberagent) were developed through free association. Somewhere along the line I realized that they reflected three distinct aspects of my own personality. That's why I always know what each one would say or how they would react in any given situation. (It makes the writing that much easier!) It's only natural that the character development would be self-actualizing. It's funny how I'll notice that conflicts within the group can reflect some inner conflict that I might be having at the time.

I'm trying to capture the excitement of three of my favorite comics genres: pre-code horror; the "big monster books" that Stan and Jack produced in the early '60s; the incredible superhero stuff that marvel put out in the '60s and '70s. But don't call it retro! My goal was to simply inject some long-missing adventure and excitement into the comic stores for a change.

Journey Into Madness
This is a horror anthology based on the format of the Marvel (then Atlas) books produced between 1949 and 1955, before the CCA came in and ruined everything!! Some of the greatest writers and artists were on staff at that time. These were great years for the comics medium. A lot of the plots for later T.V. shows, such as *Twilight Zone*, *Outer Limits* and *Night Gallery*, seemed to follow (coincidentally, I'm sure!) many of the Atlas storylines. These books were one of the major reasons for my interest in comics, so it's only fitting for me to produce a sort of tribute.

from Journey Into Madness

Upcoming Project
With Roy Thomas, Orlando will be producing *The Intruder*, shipping in 1997 from CFD Productions.

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS, NEW YORK
PROFESSOR FROST...
MY UNCLE SIMON HAS KAREN!!! I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE PLANS ON DOING WITH HER!!
GRRR
OH REALLY?
AND I SUPPOSE YOU GOT AWAY WITHOUT A SCRATCH BECAUSE OF CLEAN LIVING?
LOOK, FREAK,
I'LL DO THINGS THE WAY I DO THEM. THAT'S WHAT UNCLE SAM PAYS ME FOR. IT'S BAD ENOUGH I HAVE TO WORK WITH SUB-HUMANS AND HORROR-MONSTERS WITHOUT--
AGENT WEST, I SUGGEST YOU UNHAND THE YOUTH AND ALLOW HIM TO LEAD US TO WHERE THIS HAPPENED.
AT THIS POINT IT'S ALL WE HAVE TO WORK WITH.
SPAK

OKAY FROST. IT'S GETTIN' PERSONAL NOW, IS IT? WELL, I'LL BURN YOU TO A--
GENTLEMEN, MUST I REMIND YOU THAT MS. JAMES REMAINS ENDANGERED?
YOU--
MAYBE SOME OTHER TIME, Eh DOC?
LET'S GO!

SLITHER!! YOU TAKE SCYTHELON. LET THE CYBERAGENT TAKE KREEGOROK. SIMON KILGORE IS MINE!
ACKNOWLEDGED, PROFESSOR FROST.
AGENT WEST! KREEGOROK IS YOUR ASSIGNED OPPONENT!
WITH PLEASURE, SLITH!
THOSE TELEPATHIC FREAKAZOIDS GIVE ME THE CREEPS.
SPLENDID! OUR GUESTS HAVE ARRIVED!
MY, MY. HENRY FROST.. THE NOTORIOUS "DOCTOR WARLOCK"...
I SUPPOSE I OWE THIS VISIT TO THE RETRIEVAL OF YOUR FORMER FIANCE?
I MUST SAY, old man, I REALLY DON'T SEE THE POINT, CONSIDERING YOUR, ah, "PRESENT STATE".

CYBERGEN ships January 1997 from **CFD Productions**

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No Profit For The Wise, CFD Productions

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Infrared Graffiti

Pink Stucco Girl

Annette ties a pink ribbon in her hair
That matches the pink stucco building
Where she rents an apartment.
She goes to work - her money all spent -
But she'll earn more tonight.
Feeling cracked like the pink stucco walls,
She fixes her fishnets.

On the street, she skips, it flips
The back of her skirt up just right.
She smiles and thinks, *yeah tonight,*
It'll be a good catch.

Playing the little girl in pink ribbons
With pink cheeks, she speaks
With inexperience: "What's that?"
"The price sounds fair."
"Put what? Where?"
She giggles, wiggles her hips,
"Lets play. My place is this way."

In the room done up like a little girl's,
The ribbon stays rigid in her curls.
On her back, she turns her head.
He says, "look at me," but instead,
She looks at the little doll house
In the corner, painted pink.
She tries hard to think:
Imagine she's just a doll,
Cracked link pink stucco walls,
A doll, some little girl's favorite,
Cracked pink, needing to be repainted.
Someday that girl will pick her up,
Or painter give her a touch up,
Lay her alone in a doll's bed
And repaint her, not pink, but white instead.

- Gary Leising

The Rules

Written in cursive,
posted to a tree
within the cemetery's
maze of borders:

1) No Smokin'

2) No Tombstone Topplin'

3) No Night Visitin'

4) No Grave Robbin'

5) No Vacancy

- Brice Patrick Gorman

The Self-Portrait, 1652

There's a rag of time
In Rembrandt's face,
And a pair of injured eyes,
Two bloodstains of poverty.

A man paints with a mirror.
In the reflection,
We see how darkness hurts,
And how light opens wounds.

- Timothy Hodor
reprinted from *Negative Capability*

Vendetta

by David J. Pettigrew

It was a hot steamy August night and the bubbling black asphalt of the city streets had soaked up enough heat that day to fry an egg. Juan Regandue stood sweating on the corner of 5th and 72nd as a white Mazda, framed in electric-blue neon, sped by, blasting Tito Puente, leaving behind a wake of awkward silence.

Despite the oppressive heat, Juan shivered. The city had never seemed this quiet before. Even last year when a drug deal had gone bad and he had lain bleeding in the gutter outside Rosa's green grocery with a bullet in his side. Everyone had just shushed up and tip-toed around him like he was a chunk of bloody phlegm some bum had honked up and spat on the sidewalk.

No. Tonight it wasn't just quiet. It was still. *Too* still.

"So, Juan. You going in there or what?"

Rino was four-nine, which made Juan appear to be a giant at five-foot-ten. Both men were well-built, but while Rino was short and squat like a miniature Panzer S-5 combat tank, Juan was tall and lithe.

"That's why we're here."

"Don't do it, man." Rino began stalking back and forth on the sidewalk like a caged cat. "It's stupid."

"Fuck off!" Juan snarled. He reached in the back pocket of his jeans, pulled out a half-pint of vodka and held it up to the streetlight. There were three swigs left. Unscrewing the top, he put the glass to his lips and threw his head back. The hot booze ran down his throat, hit the bottom of his stomach and tried to bounce back up again. Almost choking, Juan re-swallowed the sour-tasting mixture of stomach acid, fermented potato skins and bile.

Rino stopped his concrete shuffle. "Hey! You got any more of that?"

"Whatever you can suck out is yours."

Juan handed over the bottle. Rino lapped up three drops before tossing it over his shoulder. It crashed on the asphalt, sending shards of glass flying.

"So let's go," Juan said.

They walked down the steel steps to the level below the sidewalk and followed a garbage-lined alley that ran between the adjacent buildings.

At the end was a storefront buried deep in the shadows. Across the top was a wooden sign that had "Bontanica Generale" painted across the top in faded blue letters.

Two large windows were masked with dried grass blinds, much like Juan's grandmother had hanging on her veranda in Cuba to prevent the hot midday sun from frying Juan's paraplegic grandfather who was wheeled outside everyday after lunch.

As Juan reached for the doorknob, a hand streaked out of the darkness and grabbed his wrist, the brown fingers squeezing.

"You're sure you want to go in there?" Rino asked for the last time.

Juan wanted to speak but his lips were too dry. He tried to wet them but his tongue felt like a slab of shoe leather someone had stuffed in his mouth.

Rino was the second person who thought he was an idiot. The first had been Marco. Marco was a Bruja. A Santiera witch. Juan had gone to him the day before with his request.

"No!" Marco had screamed, thumping a heavy fist down on his wooden Caja, or majic table. "No black majic. I do not practice vendetta!"

Juan had cursed at the old man, screaming his reasons for such a request. He had even shown Marco a picture of the virginal Jeanne-Marie. But the witch had merely turned his back on the young man and gone back to mashing sour roots.

But then this morning, while Juan was sifting on the wooden seat of the toilet that served twelve families in his project, a slip of paper had been shoved underneath the door.

"I thought about Jeanne-Marie last night and what she meant to you."

It was a deep voice. It was Marco.

"I cannot do what you ask. You must go to a Mubato. They have the powers you seek. Your soul will be cursed, but if you must go, give them this."

Juan had reached between his bare legs and picked up the paper, crossing himself several times. Mubato. The dark side of Santiera. On the paper were several symbols and an address in the city. This address.

"I said, 'are you going in there?... Rino's hand tightened around his brother's wrist.

"Yes!" Juan cried impatiently, shaking his hand free.

"Then, go with the devil!"

Rino shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans and slowly walked back down the alley. When he reached the stairs he turned and paused for a second. Juan hadn't moved and was still staring at the door. Rino moved on. He had already decided that no woman was worth going through this crap.

When his brother's footsteps had died away, Juan reached forward and twisted the knob. The door was heavy plate-glass with a solid wooden frame. Juan pushed it open and a flurry of smells and odors rushed out of the confines of the store interior like freed demons. He sniffed, absorbing the smells, trying to identify them.

There was ginger, cinnamon, the bitter gynope and several teas. Familiar smells. He stepped into the darkness and closed the door behind him. A bell tinkled overhead as the bolt snapped into place.

Juan looked around. A small amount of light filtered through the cracks of the grass drapes and highlighted the dust that hung in the air like a fine mist on a rainy day. Shelves stuffed with shadowy surprises were everywhere. Juan took a step forward into the main aisle and saw the outline of a counter at the rear of the shop.

"Stop !"

Juan froze.

Behind the counter a curtain had quickly parted and Juan saw a momentary flash of light that silhouetted a large round shape. Then there was blackness again.

"What do you want?" The voice was too high for a man and too low for a woman.

"I have come for help."

"We are closed now." There was a rustle of clothing as the figure moved from behind the counter. Juan squinted, trying to get a bead on it.

"Come back another time and I will help you. I will mix you a potion. You are sick? I will make you well. Perhaps you would like to catch the eye of a woman and do not want your girlfriend to know?"

Juan detected an accent like his cousin had, from the southern part of Cuba.

"I will make her do things to you that would make even you blush," the voice continued. "But not tonight. Tonight we are closed."

"I was sent here," Juan shouted back. "I want vendetta!"

The creature suddenly cleared the edge of the counter and rushed down the aisle toward him, bearing down like a steaming locomotive. Juan jumped back but it kept coming, slamming into him, pinning him to wall. He struggled, twisting his body back and forth, trying to escape. A beefy claw grabbed his shirt front, lifting him off the ground. A large round hairless face with small black eyes pressed against his and an overly-sweet breath made the vodka begin to back up again.

"Who sent you?"

Juan struggled like a pinned insect. He pulled the slip of paper from his jeans and held it up in front of the giant's face.

"Marco."

Maintaining the grip on Juan's shirt, the beast grabbed the paper with his other hand. He unfolded it and stared at the symbols for several minutes. Then he let go. Juan almost collapsed on the ground, his legs numb quivering sticks.

"Come with me."

The creature led the way back to the counter and held the curtain open while Juan stepped through.

Juan blinked several times as his eyes became accustomed to the bright light. They were standing in a combination living quarters - storeroom. Flickering candles hung everywhere, giving the feeling of liquidity, as if nothing in the room had a predetermined shape but was moving and breathing and shifting in time and space and density. Juan felt dizzy and wanted to puke. On the left were several metal shelves stacked with merchandise still in the boxes. On the right were two neatly-made beds. In front of him against the wall was a stained porcelain sink and a laboring refrigerator.

The walls were plastered with religious pictures and symbols and behind the beds was painted a life-size mural of St. Lazarus on crutches crossing 42nd street. The saint had large festering wounds on both legs and several young children were crowding around the figure, their hungry pink tongues anxiously licking at the putrid green exudate that oozed from the draining sores.

Strings of blue and white beads, the colors of this saint, were stapled into the wall and draped around the picture like boughs of ivy, hanging down to the floor.

In the center of the room on a small cast iron stand stood a blackened female human skull, its front teeth splintered, a candle protruding from a hole that had been drilled in the brain case by the girl's boyfriend before she had died. Next to it was a sooty cauldron and a stuffed doll.

"Wait here."

Juan turned and stared at his escort. The man was hairless and obese with large fleshy rolls of skin hanging from his face and neck. He was wearing a flannel shirt, a baggy camouflage pants and boots. A light-skinned Latino, his eyes were only an inch apart and appeared to be the result of a brother and sister who had grown too familiar.

The creature disappeared down the rows of shelves. Juan heard two voices, whispering, followed by a low, drawn-out, orgasmic moan. Seconds later the giant returned with a young girl in tow.

She was barely twelve years old with long black shimmering hair that fell to her waist and large eyes that were so dark the pupils were invisible. A slightly flared nose and high cheekbones hinted at parents of mixed marriage and only seemed to make her simple beauty that much more exotic. Her slim body was covered with a gauze-like white shift that came mid-thigh and was cut low on top. Her mocha feet were bare.

The girl batted her eyelashes innocently at Juan like a young girl going out on a first date and he felt himself become aroused. She stepped closer and he smelled cocoa nuts and a familiar female scent. The

girl had just had sex.

The girl leaned over and stared in his eyes for a minute. Then she walked back to the skull and cauldron and sat down quickly, the white gauze swirling up around her waist for split second. She was naked underneath. She tucked the dress around her crossed legs and patted the floor in front of her.

"Sit."

Visions of that furry patch dancing in his head, Juan took a seat on the concrete floor directly opposite the girl, their knees touching.

He looked down. Her fingernail had sliced his palm open like a fillet knife opens the belly of a fish.

"My name is Margaret." She nodded at the giant who had positioned himself by the curtained doorway. "That is Bastille. He protects me. If you tell anyone about me he will bring you back here and I will watch you choke to death on your own penis. I am seeing you only because Marco sent you. Marco is one of my fathers. I have many. Marco is a good Bruja but he is not Mubato."

She smiled and he saw her teeth for the first time. Gold and silver rings swung from holes that had been drilled through the front six.

"Give me your hand."

She leaned forward and Juan stared down the front of her dress at two small round red-tipped breasts. The girl took his hand and gently held it, palm side up. It looked like a block of cement in her soft paws.

She began tracing his lifeline with her fingernail and halfway across his heavily calloused palm, she looked up and stared into his eyes. "Tell me about Jeanne-Marie."

Juan ripped his hand from her grasp and a sharp pain coursed through his wrist and up his arm through the shoulder. How did this girl know her name?

He looked down. Her fingernail had sliced his palm open like a fillet knife opens the belly of a fish. A thin line of blood was welling up and puddling in his palm.

Then the pulsating pain quickly vanished and was replaced with a tingling numbness in his fingers.

"Jeanne-Marie..." Juan stopped and wet his lips. He spoke in broken phrases like years ago when he just arrived from Cuba. "She was my woman. We have been together for five years now. Since she was eleven.

"Last week we went to a party. I didn't want to go. Too many drug dealers there. But Jeanne-Marie ... she is so young... so full of life... she always likes to go where the people are. She said we would have a good time. There would be lots of music and dancing..."

Juan's balls tightened as he recalled that evening's activities.

"So we went. It was in a large warehouse uptown. And there were many people. And music and dancing..."

"And Tanto Cortez."

Juan's pulse went into overdrive and he felt an imaginary hand wrap its fingers around his heart and squeeze. Even the sound of the name made his intestines want to open up and let dinner dribble out. How did one little girl know so much?

He swallowed hard. "Yes. And Tanto Cortez."

"What happened to Jeanne-Marie when she met Cortez?"

"The same thing that happens to every girl who meets him!" He screamed. Didn't she know?

"She fell in love! Cortez is one of the biggest drug dealers in the neighborhood. He's rich! He drives fancy cars!"

Juan stopped for a minute and his mind wandered. He imagined his young beautiful Jeanne-Marie laying on a dirty wooden floor, squirming and giggling, dress bunched around her waist as a laughing Cortez spread her legs and climbed on top of her, flagpole anticipating penetration, hands twisting and tugging on her warm, supple flesh.

Margaret's cool hand on his knee jerked him back.

"And?" she asked.

"And he took her. Up to his fancy townhouse with the other women. I warned her that he would use her until he was bored and then throw her out but it was too late. She was under his spell. I don't think she wanted to go but she had to."

"How long is she pregnant?"

Juan's head jerked up. "Two months. How did you know?"

Margaret's eyes flashed and she gave him the trace of the smile. She nodded at his bleeding palm. "I have seen your grandchildren.

"You say that you want vendetta?"

Juan quickly nodded. "Yes! I have even brought the necessary items you require." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a plastic sandwich bag. He laid it on the floor between them. From his other pocket he withdrew five one-hundred dollar bills. "And this is payment for your services."

"What is in the bag?"

Juan anxiously picked it up and dumped the contents into his uninjured palm. He held it out, his eyes searching hers for approval.

"Clippings from Cortez's toenails. And a piece of his ponytail. I paid one of his women for these."

Margaret crept forward on all fours. She studied the

curled brown pieces of bone and hair for a minute. Then she spat.

The force blew several trimmings out of Juan's hand and the wad of pink mucous smacked against his palm and exploded into silvery tentacles that coated his hand like the finest spider's web.

"Stupid ignorant peasant!" She grabbed the bills from the floor and tearing them in half, threw the pieces in his face.

"You think this is majic?" Margaret took the doll from the table and tore off the head. "Now this person has a headache. No? Or maybe we stick some pins into it for good measure! Huh?" A long needle appeared between her slim fingers and she savagely pierced the torso of the torn doll several times. Pieces of straw stuffing flew out from the holes and floated to the floor like snow.

Juan drew back, afraid, as the young child suddenly turned into a madwomen.

"This is bullshit! Props for a public who believe in silly rituals that use dead chickens and skinned rabbits!"

She stuck her right hand into the cauldron and fumbled around for a second. Pulling out an object she held it out to him. It looked like a stewed prune sifting on her open palm.

"This person gave me one eye so his enemy would loose two!"

Margaret stood up in a flurry of skirts and long brown legs. "And now, come with me and I'll show you real majic... and how much it costs!"

She grabbed Juan's wrist and dragged him to his feet and across the room to a corner closet. The door was missing and a purple sheet covered the opening. He felt his heart pounding.

"A woman who could not have a baby by her husband was raped by his brother. She became pregnant. Her husband found out and left her. She swore vendetta. The child's father will die soon."

She ripped the curtain aside. Juan thought his heart would explode.

The child was no more than 6 months old. A foot-long galvanized spike had been driven through its head and a silvery end protruded from each ear. A wire was attached to either end and now the corpse dangled from the ceiling of the closet, slowly twisting round and round like a grotesque mobile. Only it wasn't a corpse yet. Juan pissed in his pants when the eyes opened and sadly stared up at him.

"You are truly a wonder, my sweet."

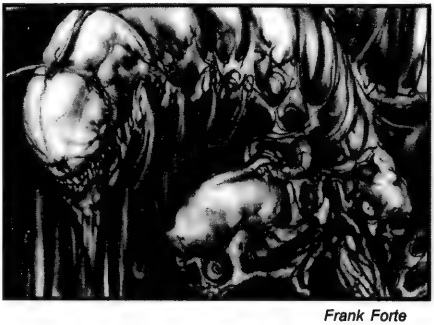
Jeanne-Marie lifted her head from Cortez's crotch, gave him a drug-induced smile and then returned to her supplications. Cortez reached out to a bedside table, took out a cigarette and lit up. Breathing out the smoke he stretched his hairy, naked body, careful not to disturb the girl.

With one last long slurp Jeanne-Marie straightened up and, sliding up his body, straddled his thighs. Grasping him in her left hand, she began lowering herself, ever so slowly.

"That's good, babe! So good!" he moaned as her muscles began twitching around his shaft.

When he was completely inside her and their sweaty crotches were grinding against each other he slid his hands up her smooth thighs, prepared to fondle her swelling breasts. He stopped at the slight swelling of her belly. Then he grunted. Something was wrong. He felt his body tense. Suddenly she didn't feel good any more. The grip on him was too intense. Nothing had muscles that strong.

"Get... off... me..." he cried between gritted teeth trying to push the astounded girl away. It was beginning to hurt. Bad!



Frank Forte

Jeanne-Marie tried to climb off but she couldn't. It was as if she was being held on. "I... can't!" she screamed as something in her belly moved.

The grip of ten partially developed fingers tightened to the point of agonizing pain around Cortez's organ and he felt a rush of warm fluid as the skin around his self began to rip. Fresh blood percolated through-out Jeanne-Marie's cavity before spilling out of her, staining the bed.

"Shit!!"

Rico and Bensefel, Cortez's evening bodyguards heard the agonizing screams and rushed into the room, machine pistols ready. No one saw Cortez disappear inside Jeanne-Marie. But they did see the two-foot geyser of blood that sprang from their boss' crotch several seconds before he died.

Later, in a small "Botanica", Margaret tossed what looked like an undercooked sausage into her cauldron. That night, Juan went to sleep with the dull satisfying ache of vendetta throbbing between his legs.

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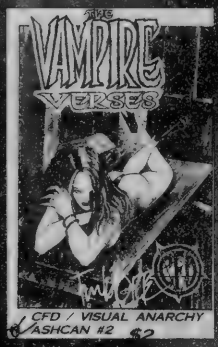

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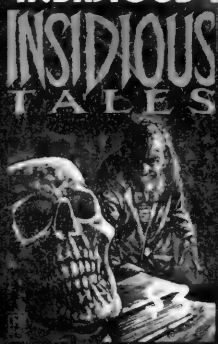

FROM BEYONDE #1 & 2

Beneath the Racks...

In Short...

Powder Monkey Productions, featuring creator **Harvey Mercadoocasio** and his miniseries *Europa and the Pirate Twins*, is promising retailers 150% of orders for the second issue through Diamond Comics Distributors. Those ordering 20 copies of #2 through Diamond, will receive 30. The book features pin-ups by **Glenn Barr**, **David Mack**, **Rich Pace**, **Louis Small Jr.**, **Ethan Van Sciver**, **Gus Vasquez** and **Mike Wieringo**.

Top Cow rejoined forces with **Image Comics**. Effective with products shipping in January 1997, Top Cow items will only be available through Image and Diamond Comics Distributors. Image co-founder **Marc Silvestri** said the removal of **Rob Liefeld** from the company enables Top Cow's return.

Slave Labor Graphics hit 10 years, its first comic book, Shadowstar #3, having been published in January 1986.

Comics

Espers #1-3
Halloween Comics
Writer: **James Hudnall**
Artists: **Greg Horn**

This book sat in the box for a bit - mainly because the covers didn't "grab" me like they should. Then I kicked myself for not picking it up sooner.

Skye Lanning is psychic. She can put her hand on something, and know who was there.

But this book is not about ordinary psychics. In this world of the Espers, people can send others to face death, and fight back, all through the mind. It's a scary story in the depiction of the powers of the mind. More so, it deserves recognition. Artist Greg Horn is consistent with character definitions, and helps make this one of the best independent books I've seen in a long time.

21-24 pg b/w story; plus previews. $2.95 USA Back Issues: $4 each, Halloween Comics, 16350 Ventura Blvd, Ste 351, Encino, CA 91436.

The War of the Worlds #1
Caliber Comics
Writer: **Randy Zimmerman**

Artist: **Horus**

We've heard the story. Even if we haven't read, we've got a pretty good idea what it's about. So why spend the time to go through all that?

Because with writer Zimmerman and artist Horus, we're brought what some would call legendary tales in a whole new modernity. With crisp writing and appealing art, this fast-paced action book is recommended. $2.95 USA. 1-800-22-COMIC.

Dr. Wonder #1-3
Old Town Publishing
featuring **Dick Ayers**, **David Allikas**, **Richard Ayers**

Okay, so we don't go overboard with the superhero genre. And why should we? It's the mainstream of comics and the mainstream we are not. But when we sat down, and really flipped through the pages of *Dr. Wonder*, premiering this year, it brought back a true sense of what comics were originally all about. Back to the '60s when guys like Dick were part of a studio, and the result of a comic awed many children.

Dr. Wonder is the type of comic we would have seen rolled up in the back of a pants pocket. Though it's in black and white, the stories it divulges carry just as much action and power one would hope for. With classic superhero covers and all, it's worth a shot in just about any collection. Allikas' writing and publishing work, and the ability to bring in competent artists makes this book a plus.

32 b/w pages, f/c covers, $2.95 USA. Old Town, 33 Harrison Ave, Franklin Square, NY 11010.

Silly Daddy #11

Joe Chiappetta

When it comes to self-publishing, you never know what you're going to get. And though Joe

Chiappetta's artwork is not the best we've seen, his humorous and sincere storytelling comes from someone educated. Bringing in some of his own publishing information, and day-to-day life knowledge, Joe continues to tell compelling (yet sometimes twisted) stories, that are often invited by people like us. If you haven't had the chance to check out this small press title, featuring b/w artwork and covers, send $3 to Joe at 2209 Northgate, N. Riverside, IL 60546-1339.

CDs & Stuff

Zacherley
Dead Man's Ball
© 1995, Tristique, Ltd.
Featuring Mike Gilks, Rick Alvcard, Barry Hnoedl, Paul (Wolfman) Hendall, Phil (Vlad) Gelfer and Jan Uvena.
Produced by Richard Gilks.

If you're a young'n, no one is expecting you to know all about **Zacherley**, who began his career in 1958 as "Roland" at Philadelphia's WCAU. Within a year, he hit the Billboard Top Ten with "Dinner with Drac." But this horror host's most notorious years occurred after, when he became, as called by **Dick Clark**, the "Cool Ghoul."

What happened for years after, throughout the '60s, this rock-and-roll and horror phine has dee-jayed, hosted horror movies, a live dance and then some.

His newest CD features songs of past and present; several older songs have been re-recorded. In short, it's a must for Zach fans and even more so for those who haven't had a chance to see or hear this creature of the night.

Tracks include: "Dinner with Drac," "Dead Man's Ball," "Happy Halloween," Formaldehyde," and "Werewolf Bite Me." It also includes Zach TV Audio.

This ain't no Monster Mash from the guy who tells everyone goodnight "whatever you are."

$12; Tristique, Ltd., P O Box 2726, Southampton, NY 11969. Web: http://www.zacherley.com

Magazines

Lollipop
Music & Entertainment Magazine

If you're looking for another variety mag, this is it. Issue #28 (August 1996) featured bands like Soundgarden and The Hunger. This 64-page (mag. size, newsprint, b/w interior) spotlights independent and underground music, as well as film and related entertainment, mixed with some limited mainstream tastes.

Published monthly, it's well worth the $2 newsstand price. I'd write about the price of back issues. P O Box 147, Boston, MA 02123.

Screem Magazine
Screem Publishing

Movies. Books. Videos. Anything horror (and we don't mean scary Hannibal Lecter), and mainly independent and underground, you'll find in Screem. This 48-page mag. size publication also features our favorite Scream Queens and more. The format and design may not be the greatest, but the coverage and quality of photographs is superb.

Past issues have featured interviews with Dennis Hopper, Vampira, Peter Jackson, Uncle Ted and Buddy Giovanazzo. For Mature Readers.

Back issues $3.95, plus $1.50 p/h for one issue, $2.90 two or more: 490 S. Franklin St, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702-3765.

Lacunae reviews comics, books, music, independent films, self-published items and more. Send all review stuff to:
Lacunae
Attn: Reviews
P O Box 827
Clifton Park, NY 12065

Back Issues of *Lacunae Magazine*

- still cover price -

Lacunae #3: Neil Gaiman, Hart D. Fisher, Billy Tucci

Lacunae #4: Kirk Lindo, Nancy Collins, Elaine Lee

Lacunae #5: Daniel Presedo, David Lapham

Lacunae #7: The Misfits, Ken Meyer Jr.

Lacunae #8: Steve Bissette, Wayne Allen Sallee

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Coming December 1996

Lacunae #10:
Original fiction by ***Joseph M. Monks***, full-color cover by ***Ken Meyer Jr.***

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For Mature Readers

STEVE BISSETTE

PART TWO

Do you consider writing any more?
I write a lot. As a matter of fact I'm probably, space permitting, gonna start sticking some of the short stories I've got sitting in my files into *SpiderBaby Comix*. I've got a couple of strong ones, I think, and those are definitely horror. When I write, that's what comes out. The other writing I do is what you see in *Tyrant*, research heavy stuff or criticism. I still write for magazines now and again for *Video Watchdog*, *Ecco*, *Euro Trash Cinema*, film magazines I love. I think criticism as we understand it has lost its function. When I sit down to write about comics or films or something, I see my job as putting into perspective for a reader coming to it cold where something comes from, how it fits into what's already happened and what's going on. I don't see that a lot in criticism. To me that's the value of it. I enjoy writing criticism because I think I've got perceptions that are informed and unique: they're not earth shaking by any means, but I think there's some fresh things to be said and I don't hear people saying those things. I don't read people putting those thoughts down.

I'd have to say it's an opinion game and not a criticism game.
Yeah, which is pointless. Case in point: a lot of the material in Taboo are not the kind of comics I would write and draw and some of them weren't material I particularly liked, but if it disturbed me, if it moved me, it was in. That to me should be the function of criticism. Was it the *Comics Journal* that did the sort of dismissive overview of the Boneyard Press stuff?

Yeah, they reviewed stuff that was all 2-years-old and they got their facts wrong.
Yeah, it was long gone and I'm not a steady reader of your material (as you and I have talked about over the past week) but the goal of it is purely evident. There's no way someone could look back at the first *Dark Angel* and the books that you've done this past year and not see, my God, look at the growth that's happened here. Look at the different direction he's taken, especially if you take into account your poetry and your personal writings. There's a lot there to write about and to just dismiss it as "this is gory shit, get it away from me," don't waste my time.

Well, they're comparing it to James Joyce and Tolstoy...
Oh, that's silly too. It's like when they used to do the reviews of *Raw* in the *Journal*, and I'll pull away from *Journal* bashing, but I will touch on this. How can you write about Gary Panter and Charles Burns without acknowledging their influences come from bad Japanese movies and drive-in flicks like *The Brain That Wouldn't Die*? I mean, you're missing a vital part of those artists lives if you don't understand or share in some way the roots that they are working from. They did a write up on *Raw* talking about Panter in terms of these obscure 19th century artists and it's like, "Fuck, *Godzilla* had more impact on Gary Panter." (laughs). Anyway, so with my writing I've got a lot of stuff that I've done that will see publication - short stories, essays, criticism and so on.

So you've got a lot of short stories around.
I've got about four right now. I've got enough that I think about two years down the road I'll put together a little anthology and pop it out there on my own. One thing I've learned is the only obstacle between a writer/artist and a potential audience is getting the stuff in print. You can always, in time, find ways of getting it out there. You're not going to get rich doing it, but that's not the point.

It's a matter of persistence.
The best advice I was ever given in this field was when Dave Sim told me , "Don't go away. Whatever you do, don't go away." And especially given what I was going through in my personal life and my professional life, at the time Dave said that to me it was powerful and that really is the truth of it. As a reader and as a consumer, I follow artists.

Do you find yourself surprised about who your fans are when you meet them?
Yeah, often pleasantly surprised. We all meet those fans where you go, "Fuck, get this guy away from me." But I'm often pleasantly surprised by who I've reached out there. Again, it was heartening to me when you told me that "A Frog is a Frog" had made such an impact on you - the story that appeared in this fucking Marvel black and white magazine. And it spoke to you and you still remember it. But more important to me are the fans that are just the day to day people you meet. They make their living running a restaurant or...

Have you ever had any really strange run-ins with the fans? That really, like, kinda scared you?
Oh, yeah, but they weren't necessarily fans of mine. They were just comic book fans or pop culture fans. There was one guy in New York that scared me so bad I didn't go back to New York shows for a couple years.

Wow. What'd he do?
He came up and because the Hulk was green and because I was drawing Swamp Thing and he was green he thought I had all this secret information about the Hulk. The guy was psychotic, I mean, the guy was

fuckin' nuts and was staring so intently into my eyes that I knew all I had to do was give him honest answers. I wasn't going to lie to him, I wasn't gonna pander, I was just gonna tell him exactly what I thought about his question and it satisfied him to a point but he kept coming back and by the end of that show I was like, "Fuck, I don't even want to be near this area for a time because this guy, if someone gave him the wrong answer he could pop 'em." That's about as scary as it ever really got for me. I've had fans ask for strange fuckin things, I've also had fans, when I was doing *Taboo*, I had body parts mailed to me once or twice. I had a little vial mailed to me once that had a woman's name and as I was looking at it, whatever was inside rolled around and I saw it was the end of someone's finger. Someone once mailed me this little, little envelope, I'm talking a 1" by 1 ½" envelope, the address was in pencil on masking tape, the stamp was stuck on the back. How it got through the postal system to me is a miracle. So I carefully unraveled the tape and inside, folded up, is that kind of paper you used to get in grade school that had like the chunks of wood pulp still floating in it. And he said, "I'm a musician and I wrote you a *Taboo* theme, and here it is, you can have it" and the theme was like sub-John Carpenter, you know, it was like, just these single notes sustained for a whole bar, like this drone dirge thing and then inside of that was a blue pill of some kind. And a note wrapped around it saying "I really like this here's one for you." Into the garbage that went, so…

Whoooo….No I haven't had any drugs sent to me. I've had guys send me bondage pictures of their wives…their old wives, their very old wives, tied up, but I haven't gotten pictures of dead bodies and stuff like that. Snuff stuff, but I haven't gotten any body parts.
You're deprived some how.

Yeah, I know Joe Monks was sent, he got a box, like a package of shit.
Oh, well, that would put me off for a bit. A box of shit, I'd feel like I was doing something wrong there.

Yeah, someone didn't like one of their stories in Cry For Dawn and ….
Well, you can take some comfort, Joe, in the fact that they handled that shit longer and more than you did.

EDITOR's NOTE: Actually, the alleged incident was that a fan who didn't like one of the issues of Cry For Dawn wiped his ass with it. No handling of actual shit was involved.

Wrap it up. Tape it up. Move it into the box… that's goofy.
No. By and large, the fans…when I do shows and signings, I'm there for the people that come in the door. That's why I'm there. Those are the people that earn me my living. **DC Comics** didn't earn me my living. The *Swamp Thing* readers earned me my living. And I'm there for those people.

Does it piss you off with the black and white reprints?
No, I'm overjoyed, I'm glad they're doing it and we get monthly checks. The only frustration is that every time DC does something with our work there's a door open there to renegotiate. I've really buried my hatchet with that whole period of my life. I take responsibility for the fact I signed those fucking contracts.

What were you thinking when you signed a gag contract, a vow of silence contract?
What was I thinking? That hospital bill will be paid now. And my attorney said "sign it". I can't talk too much about it but I also made the decision the day I did that, "I will never do this again, I will never again get myself into this position."

Cause I just finished reading *In Search of Enemies* by John Stockwell about the CIA and the war in Angola. He was talking about his vow of silence, that he had signed with the CIA and how technically it was illegal.
Yep. But see, the interesting conundrum there is for them to prosecute him for breaching that silence validates everything in there. I just uh… well, Rick Vietch talked about what happened in his interview in the *Comics Journal*. The information's out there.

I was just curious about what you were thinking when you signed it.
You've got to remember at that time I was punch-drunk, that's the best term for it. It was my friend Tim Truman who said, "Steve, it's like working with an alcoholic, you don't seem to know right from wrong anymore." And that's true. I didn't. When I was done with DC I went through that process I see so many creative people go through, attaching themselves to a publisher and you mistake the business transaction for some form of friendship. You believe that there's some human level to what's happening there.

Especially with corporations.
Especially with corporations. At least when its a single individual or sole proprietorship there is some one culpable that you can confront whether good or bad, you can assess it in some human term. But when you're working with Time Warner, there is no human level to it. It really was beyond disorienting to me. It took me about a year and a half to get back on my feet in terms of even having personal ethics. I wasn't cheating on my wife or anything, but in my professional life I was

certainly functioning on that level. I was completely fucked up and a lot of it was coming out of, what's the old saying, "wrong is right". In every transaction I had with DC during about 2-3 year period, wrong was right. When they committed the wrong it was right. And how many years do you go through that before you just start to go, "wait a minute, am I wrong here?" By the time I signed that nondisclosure agreement, I was a pretty scrambled human being. But I did have the where-withal when it happened to come out of there and just go, "Never again. I am not setting myself up for this again." And I haven't. Even with all the crazy shit that happened at Tundra, I never put myself in a position where I could not discuss with anyone what was going on in my life.

Are there people you're thinking of now that you'd really like to work with in the business?
Actually not anymore. There are people in the business I would love to meet. There are people I would love to spend time with and talk with. But I've given 20 years of my life to collaborative efforts and I'm really enjoying applying all of those skills that I learned and refined in those collaborative efforts to something of my own. It's not an egotistical thing. It's a very harmonious way of living. To be able to go in and do something...when I made the decision to bump what was originally *Tyrant* #1 up to my third issue, I didn't have to clear it with anybody. I didn't have to justify it. I didn't have to discuss it. I didn't have to argue it. I'm working right now on issues 5, 6 and a special. I've got a five-page sequence that I'd finished two months ago that was part of #5, and I realized two weeks ago that it worked better in 6. I don't have to clear it with anybody. Nobody's even gonna fucking know. And I enjoy it. I have not had that kind of freedom. I have not given myself that kind of freedom since leaving college and beginning to work in the comics field. I always made my needs and my knowledge subservient to the job at hand. And now I'm finally in a position 20 years later to be able to apply my needs and knowledge fully to the job at hand without having to dicker with anybody. My kids don't even see issues in progress at this point. I imagine in a year or two I'll get past this level but I don't even want anyone to look at a page and go," You know, that'd be better if you did..." I don't want to hear that shit.

Are there a lot of pages you decided you didn't like?
Yeah, some of that stuff I'm gonna run as an appendix to the collected just to show people some of the detours I took. It's interesting to me that we're still in an environment that expects people to work in a collaborative vein. It's spectacular when it works, and I count myself very fortunate that I had the kind of chemistry that I enjoyed with John Totleben and Alan Moore on *Swamp Thing* and certainly with my buddy Rick Veitch on a few projects. A lot of creators work with other people all their lives and never get to taste that. So we're in an environment that kind of pushes people, you know, "Who're you gonna work with next?" We've sort of accepted this Ford Motors assembly line approach to comics. It has its benefits, primarily being that a book can come out every four weeks and ship on time.

Even the Japanese have taken that assembly line and pushed it even further.
They have, but one of the reasons I love the comic book *Gon* so much is it's done by an individual, which is an anachronism in the manga industry. Usually it's like a film studio or animation studio approach where you've got someone steering everything, but "here's my guy who does cars and here's my guy who does buildings and this woman here does the best perspectives I've ever seen in the business" and, mobilizing those people, yes, the finished product is remarkable. But I love comics primarily as a vehicle for individual expression - one artist, one vision.
..... What are you doing to deal with this Diamond slump?

For one thing I went out and got a day job. I'd been making my starving artist existence off Boneyard for the last couple of years and last year was actually my best year. And this year it's been one crash after another. And now I'm working at an advertising agency and I'm just telling my guys, "hey, there's no fucking money in this." If you still want to do it, know right up front, there's no goddamned money in it, great. If not, don't come crying to me when the books come in and the orders suck."

I, in principle, will never go exclusive with anyone on the distribution end of things. But the word alone says it all. On the plus end, I think the deck's been swabbed pretty well. I'm heartened by the fact that there's another generation of readers starting to appear. They *are* readers and if they don't get sold the "junk bond" mentality, there's hope for us a couple years down the line. I haven't seen the commercial end of comics at this kind of ebb since the mid-70s, you know, the big implosion of the mid-70s. Everything that was built that led up to the success that was being enjoyed in the field over the past five years was a recovery from that ebb, built off of that. So I'm optimistic that we, as a medium and industry, can recover if we can reach this new generation of readers with work of substance and value. I'm certainly working hard to create substantial, engaging comics. Now, we've just got to be careful not to shit where everyone's eating!

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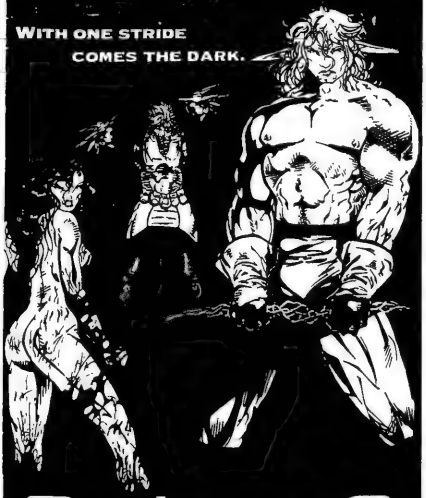

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WRITERS: CFD Productions now considering submissions for classic horror comic book series. For guidelines, SASE: 360-A W Merrick Rd, Ste 350, Valley Stream, NY 11580, Attn: Classic Horror Editor. Or browse: http://www.loginet.com/cfd

WRITERS/ARTISTS/REVIEWERS: Lacunae considers submissions year round. Payment in copies, great recognition. P O Box 827, Clifton Park, NY 12065. E-mail (no uploads): lacunaemag@aol.com. InfoLine: (518) 877-0981.

WRITERS/ARTISTS/CREATORS: Chaos! Comics now hiring. Send photocopies only. For proposals, SASE for disclosure forms. Attn: Cheryl Monti, 7645 E. Evans Rd. #6, Scottsdale, AZ 85260.

ARTISTS: Voices For Children, nonprofit organization to increase public awareness about child abuse, seeks donations of artwork for scripted stories. Scripts provided. Send samples of pencils, inks & letters to: VFC, P O Box 467, Clifton Park, NY 12065.

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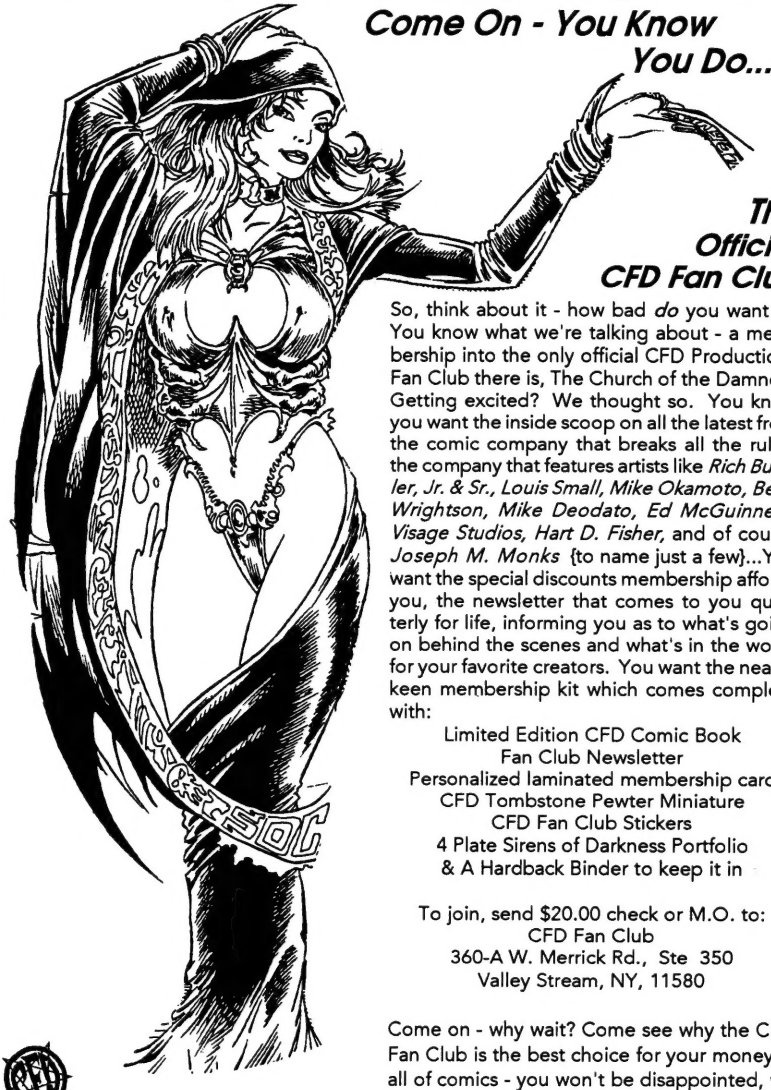

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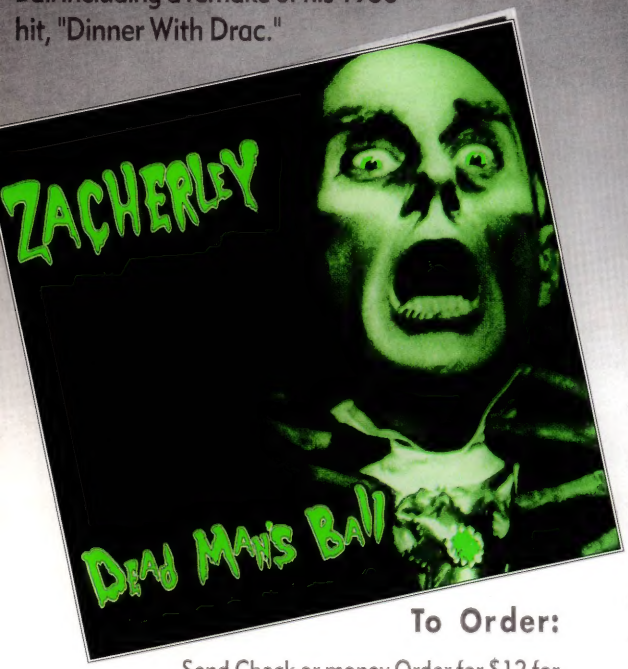

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